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Kant's Philosophy of Religion

Reconsidered—Again

Editors' Introduction

Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist

1. English Kant Interpretation from Caird to Wood (Chris L. Firestone)

In the two centuries since Kant's death, the interpretation and reception of his philosophy of religion have been characterized by two very different tendencies. According to Gordon Michalson, one tendency in reading and appropriating Kant is theologically affirmative, "veering off in the direction of constructive theological efforts to accommodate Christian faith and critical thinking." Interpretations of this kind understand Kant's philosophy to be both chastening and supportive of traditional forms of religion and theology. The other tendency portrays Kant as advocating the "abandonment of theism." Interpretations of this kind understand Kant's philosophy and its influence on theology to be primarily negative. This interpretation, when adopted by theists such as Michalson, argues that Kant's "efforts to ameliorate the theologically destructive effects of the *Critique of Pure Reason* implicitly make things worse for Christian theism, not better."

Throughout this book, interpretations of Kant's philosophy that have the tendency to be theologically negative will be called "traditional." Theologically negative interpretations of Kant either undermine in a fundamental way all conceivable theological efforts to stake a reasonable

claim regarding the nature of God and of God's relationship to the world, or seek to reinterpret all such talk about God in terms of theological non-realism or deism. Referring to the "traditional interpretation" of Kant's philosophy within these parameters is now common parlance in the field of Kant studies, just as it is in the broader philosophical academy. We will stake this book's first counterclaim to this position by arguing throughout the Introduction that theologically affirmative understandings of Kant's philosophy have just as much grounding in English-speaking Kant reception as do the so-called "traditional interpretations." We will also explain, at least in part, why the many theologically affirmative interpretations of Kant have not been as effective as the data warrants in mounting an effective challenge to the traditional read. In short, we will show that they are not as unified as the traditional interpretation. Because of their diversity of argumentation, they seem less pervasive, and because of their relative isolation, they have been less persuasive.

Before we take a brief survey of the history of Kant interpretation as it pertains to his philosophy of religion, it will be worthwhile to take a closer look at the seminal features of the traditional interpretation. Wolterstorff identifies the traditional interpretation of Kant under two motifs. They are the metaphor of a boundary and the reduction of religion to morality. Henry Allison adds an additional component, namely, the two-world rendering of Kant's theoretical philosophy. We will have more to say about this view momentarily. As for the metaphor of a boundary, it goes something like this: some things, the *ding an sich*, freedom, God, the soul, are noumenal, and some things, particular manifestations of apple pie and hippopotami, are phenomenal. With the possible exception of freedom, the noumenal realm is made up of things that can't be known and the phenomenal realm is made up of things that can be known. There is a strict separation or boundary between these realms. Our knowledge about the world is bound by the categories of the mind, making possible only the knowledge of phenomena (appearances). There are, for the traditionalist,

no coherent and acceptable ways of thinking of or speaking about God. God-thought and God-talk, couched in terms that come from our knowledge of the phenomenal realm, are strictly prohibited. If they have any ground in reason whatsoever, it comes from our desire to be moral or to understand morality. Theoretically speaking, we can only speculate about God. We can ever be said *to refer to* God in our thought or speech.

The metaphor of a boundary goes hand in hand with what Henry Allison calls the “two-world” reading of Kant’s theoretical philosophy. On this view, “Kant’s transcendental idealism is a metaphysical theory that affirms the unknowability of the ‘real’ (things in themselves) and relegates knowledge to the purely subjective realm of representations (appearances).” Kant’s philosophy under the two-world reading recognizes a sharp ontological distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. Things in the noumenal world “affect” how we perceive the world of phenomena. Nevertheless, they cannot “as they are in that world” manifest themselves nor be known in any way in the phenomenal world. Nothing can ever be said of the noumenal world from the point of view of the phenomenal world without employing some kind of contradiction or pure speculation. Things in the phenomenal world and things in the noumenal world provide two related, but decidedly different, sets of entities for Kant’s dichotomous philosophical whole. The former must be observed and studied as the proper objects of science, while the latter must remain radically unknown and subject only to fanciful speculation.

Along with the metaphor of a boundary and its cognate, the two-world reading of Kant’s theoretical philosophy, the traditional interpretation is also characterized by an exclusively moral explanation of religion. If the Kantian paradigm provides any rational justification for religion and theology, if it allows for anything intelligible to be thought or said about God, such affirmations can only be made, says the traditionalist, on the basis of Kant’s practical philosophy. This limitation of

the grounds for religion and theology to Kant's practical philosophy is said to permeate his entire corpus. It therefore has a profound impact on the interpretation of Kant's writings on religion. Traditionalists commonly hold that Kant's writings on religion are either non-critical elaborations of his overall philosophical outlook, written disingenuously under the strict censorship of the Prussian state, or incomplete extensions of his moral philosophy, written hastily (and sometimes incoherently) in his years of failing health. These writings tend to be interpreted as being philosophically important only in so far as they cohere with or elaborate upon Kant's practical philosophy.

As for Kant's practical philosophy itself, the traditionalist usually interprets it as being both ingenious and disingenuous with respect to religion and theology. Kant's practical philosophy is theologically ingenious insofar as it allows the same God that was kicked out the front door of his theoretical philosophy to be let back in the back door of morality. This allowing God back into his philosophy, as the illustration would suggest, is not understood to be an affirmative theological maneuver on Kant's part. Traditional interpreters usually dub God thought of in this way as "Lampe's God," in honor of Kant's famous manservant. Lampe, so the story goes, was apparently so upset at the thought of God's demise in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that Kant, to enhance the psychological welfare of his helper, felt it necessary to provide a moral argument for God's existence. The traditionalist usually understands Kant's actual theological position to be somewhat removed from Lampe's God, somewhere between non-realism and deism. Kant may have believed in God, but the content of that belief was either a concept of God constituted by its philosophical usefulness or a God with little philosophical import, infinitely removed from the Newtonian world inhabited by human beings.

Theologically affirmative interpretations of Kant, contrary to their negative counterparts, typically hold that Kant's philosophy provides a rationale for God-talk, God-thought, and even God-

experience. The case cannot be made without referring beyond the first *Critique*, and sometimes to Kant's writing both before and after 1781. These arguments usually make a point of capturing a sense of the whole of Kant's philosophical enterprise, something that is lost in the all-too-common fixation on the first *Critique*. Among these theologically affirmative interpretations of the whole of Kant's philosophy, the way the arguments are articulated and defended varies greatly. What we hope to show in the Introduction is that this very diversity is the real legacy of Kant, and that the "traditional interpretation" is really nothing more than the largest unified minority report on how to understand Kant's philosophy of religion. This becomes apparent when one considers the nature of the large, though still manageable, amount of literature in English Kant studies produced around the turn of the 19th into the 20th century. These early roots can then be traced as they progressed through to the present. The late nineteenth century is when Kant studies began to distinguish itself as a major subdivision of philosophy in the English-speaking academy. Corresponding to the "back-to-Kant movement" in Germany, competent research on Kant in English showed its first significant signs of life at this time. The surge of interest in Kant led to a number of significant translations of his writings and notable secondary sources. These translations, in combination with several noteworthy original studies, established the legacy of interpretive disagreement over Kant's philosophy that was to dominate the 20th century.

One of the most important interpretations of Kant emerging from this period was Kuno Fischer's *A Critique of Kant* (1888). This book provided, at the time of its translation into English (1888), the fullest account of Kant in any of the standard histories of philosophy. Following Fischer's publication, Edward Caird produced the first significant piece of Kant scholarship for our understanding of the history of English Kant interpretation. Caird's two-volume work, entitled *The*

Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1889), was the first substantial work on Kant in English covering the full extent of his philosophy. His interpretation of Kant's philosophy is divided into four "books." The first three correspond to the three *Critiques* and the fourth addresses Kant's *Religion*. For Caird, as for Fischer, the most natural reading of Kant is the holistic one. "For the theoretical, the practical and the aesthetic and religious consciousness are not really independent things, or the products of independent faculties, which stand side by side with each other; they are different forms of one conscious life, forms which rise out of each other in a certain order determined by the very nature of the intelligence." Caird argued that the most appropriate way to understand Kant's philosophy is to view it as a written manifestation of Kant's critically self-examined intellectual life. Kant's philosophy is best thought of as a work in progress. Its development depends upon a series of revolutionary insights temporally spaced in his work and related to one another in logical sequence. Caird understood Kant's thought to be a coherent and dynamic whole, in which apparent contradictions find their resolution in the development and filling out of ideas, rather than in their relative demise due to logical inconsistency.

Another influential translation, Friedrich Paulsen's *Kant*, was published in 1902. It provided an account similar to that of Caird's in detail, but opposing it in its overall vision. Among their notable agreements was their emphasis on "system" or "critical wholeness" in the interpretation of Kant. Instead of understanding Kant as a philosopher of four realms, however, Paulsen stressed Kant's early critical position of there being essentially two intellectual realms. At the time Kant wrote the first edition to the first *Critique*, he had hoped a complete critical philosophy would only need theoretical and practical explications. Kant's transcendental philosophy, Paulsen thus believed, "falls into two branches: The metaphysic of nature and the metaphysic of morals or natural philosophy and moral philosophy. This corresponds to the great division of the objective world into

spheres of nature and of freedom. The physical and moral world constitute as it were the two hemispheres of the *globus intellectualis*.” Paulsen downplays the importance of Kant’s work after the second *Critique*, highlighting Kant’s failing health and inability to construct an adequate metaphysic upon the foundation of his transcendental philosophy.

The importance of Paulsen to the history of Kantian interpretation, and especially his influence on what I have called the traditional interpretation, is found in his defense of a dualism that he found at the heart of Kant’s philosophy. One analogy he highlights is particularly illustrative. He points out that Kant uses the word “cyclops” to describe a certain kind of academic. For Kant, the one-eyed brute symbolizes those churlish scholars that are found in every faculty of learning. The obvious implication was that many scholars of the day saw the world “from a single standpoint, that of their speciality.” The true task of critical philosophy, according to Kant, is to furnish the second eye. The immediate implication is that the second eye provides an enlightened vision enabling one to see past science; it “cause[s] him also to see his object from the standpoint of other men. On this depends the humanity of science.” Now the question immediately arises as to whether or not this second eye constitutes, as Paulsen argues, Kant’s consecration of practical reason as the sole counterpart to theoretical philosophy. Given even a cursory understanding of Kant’s works after 1787, one might presume that Kant had realized an extension of the analogy by recognizing that two eyes provide *three-dimensional vision*. Only three-dimensional vision actually allows us to imagine the world as a place where humanity could one day comprise an ethical community. Paulson, however, believes the analogy to be a verification of the two-realm interpretation.

Henry Sidgwick’s *The Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant* provided a complement to Paulsen’s work. The book was compiled posthumously from Sidgwick’s lecture notes in 1905. His account of Kant’s philosophy runs parallel to Paulsen’s in that it too asserts the systematic

sufficiency of Kant's theoretical and practical philosophies. It differs slightly, however, by rejecting the image of dual spheres in Kant's work, positing instead the idea that Kant's theoretical philosophy served as the foundation for the practical philosophy. To Sidgwick's mind, Kant believed the "ultimate aim of the whole of his philosophy is to establish the beliefs in 'Immortality, Freedom, and God'" and he "establishes them primarily as postulates of the practical reason, resting ultimately on our certain, irrefragable conviction of duty, together with our equally strong conviction that, in order that morality may be more than an idle dream, reason must assume a supersensible world in which happiness depends on the performance of duty." Significantly, Sidgwick to my knowledge never mentions the third *Critique* or *Religion* in his published writings and, when addressing topics such as the imagination or God, he limits himself to the technical applications of the first *Critique* or the postulates of the second *Critique*.

With the emergence of Kant's popularity, Caird and Sidgwick, like their German counterparts Fischer and Paulsen, set the early agenda in Kant studies. In an important way, their interpretations summarized nineteenth century Kant scholarship and demarcated the parameters of Kant studies for the twentieth century. As we have seen, two distinct avenues of interpretive influence emerged: Kant as the philosopher of four realms (theory, practice, judgment, and religion) and Kant the philosopher of two realms (theory and practice). John Watson forwarded a third possibility in his *The Philosophy of Kant Explained* (1908). He held that Kant's critical philosophy was in fact a consistent and coherent whole. He pointed out that an inordinate gap existed in the two-realm interpretation of Kant and that the largely ignored third *Critique* had only to be properly understood to see the adequacy of Kant's own three-realm resolution. In the theoretical philosophy, the phenomenal/noumenal gulf represented an impassable barrier. Practical reasoning compels us to go beyond sense perception, because nature must "permit ... the realisation of freedom; in other words, the sensible and

supersensible realms must be so adapted to each other that the former does not present an insuperable obstacle to the realisation of the latter.” For Watson, this clearly meant the third *Critique* was no simple corollary to the theoretical or practical philosophies, nor was it an after thought of little consequence. Even though Kant had not envisioned the need for writing it in the early 1780’s, the third *Critique* was, in Watson’s opinion, the necessary and natural next step of Kant’s critical inquiries. “We must therefore expect that Judgment will mediate between understanding and reason by bringing into harmony the realm of nature and the realm of freedom, and that it will also be related to the feeling of pleasure and pain as the link between knowledge and desire.” Watson nowhere mentions religion with regard to the critical philosophy, but he does find consistency and completeness in Kant’s three-realm understanding of reason.

Interest in Kant’s philosophy of religion peaked in the decade following Watson’s interpretation. The 1920’s saw a revival of interest in the field of religion and religious experience due to the exceedingly popular work of Rudolf Otto. Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy* of 1923 (*Das Heilige*, 1917) represented an attempt to extend Kant’s program squarely into the realm of religious experience. Otto argued for four realms in his transcendental philosophy. According to Otto, Kant did not write a fourth *Critique*, because he did not recognize that religious experience is a universal phenomena. If he had, Kant would have been able to identify and articulate the unique sphere of religion. In short, Otto set out to do what he believed Kant did not do: discover the necessary conditions for the universal phenomena of religious experience that could be observed throughout the world. According to Otto, “the holy” is the common denominator of all religious experience; it identifies the human as an essentially religious being, and completes reason at its highest level. Suffice it to say that Otto was not a pure exegete of Kant’s writings, but an innovator whose work bears closest resemblance to Caird’s four-realm interpretation of Kant.

Spurred on by the work of Rudolf Otto, Clement Webb wrote an influential and timely book entitled *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (1926). This book was Webb's attempt to clarify the philosophical importance of religion in a purely Kantian context. On one level, his view represented a tripartite synthesis of Kantian interpretation. It contained aspects of Caird's, Sidgwick's, and Watson's views, but comprised yet a new vision of the whole of Kant's philosophy. Like Watson, Webb recognized the seriousness of the gap in Kant's natural and moral philosophies and found the bridge between them in Kant's writings of the 1790's. Unlike Watson, however, he ignored the pertinence of the third *Critique*, finding the bridge instead in Kant's writings on religion. "To appreciate the position of Kant in the history of philosophy of religion it is well to bear in mind his threefold division of the interest of human reason into the scientific, the moral, and the religious." Only religion, in Webb's estimation, could provide the successful mediation of reason's transcendental dichotomy. His work therefore brought the subject of religion back into a position of respectability in English Kant scholarship.

Unity in Kant's philosophy, according to Webb, "was essentially unattainable by the method of Science" and pure practical reason was of little help as well. Webb asserted that the essential bridge in Kant's philosophy "was apprehensible by faith, or, in other words, belonged to the sphere of Religion." On a deeper level, however, Webb's interpretation displayed significant inconsistencies. His interpretation neglected the third *Critique*, and, as a result, was unable to explain satisfactorily how the progression of Kant's thought might justify the distinctiveness of religion. He time and again conjoined religion and morality in a way reminiscent of the Paulsen/Sidgwick line of interpretation. "It is the distinctive feature of his philosophy of religion that it teaches us to seek in our moral consciousness and there alone the essence of Religion; for although in Religion there is, according to [Kant] ... a certain connexion established between practice and theory, which are

otherwise at odds, it is a connexion in which the practice determines the theory and not the theory the practice.” The integral connection between religion and morality, and the fact that religion provides Kant’s philosophy with a kind of bridge between nature and freedom, seems to be why Webb believed that Kant held to the primacy of practical reason.

Webb’s interpretation supplanted the earlier work of Caird, Sidgwick, and Watson, and became the leading perspective on Kantian religion for most of the twentieth century. Its strength lay in its ability to synthesize features important to each of the three main previous interpretations of Kant, rather than its exegetical accuracy or explanatory virtues. Webb’s interpretation integrated the systematic completeness of Watson’s account, Caird’s concern for the distinctness of Kant’s philosophy of religion, and the two-tiered Kantian interpretation of Sidgwick. The third of these interpretive approaches, however, seems to have influenced Webb’s understanding of Kant most significantly. A vital bridge between nature and freedom in the first two *Critiques* was absent in Webb’s estimation and Kant had not succeeded in providing one in the third *Critique*. Webb argued that religious faith was the principal resource in Kant’s writings to solve the problem. This faith was not a religious faith based on distinctly theological resources; it was a moral faith in the postulates “God” and “immortality” based on practical reason.

Since the publication of Webb’s *Kant’s Philosophy of Religion*, this linking of faith to moral postulates, and religion to practical reason, has established itself as the traditional approach to interpreting Kant. In the interpretations of Sidgwick, Watson, and Caird, we find three quite different attempts to demarcate the fundamental contours of Kant’s philosophy. Sidgwick held a two-tiered view, Watson suggested a three-realm view, and Caird argued for four forms of reason. Webb’s interpretation marked a shift of balance towards Sidgwick’s interpretation. The first major confirmation of this shift was the 1934 publication in English of *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen*

der bloßen Vernunft as *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Even though the translation itself quickly became the new standard and proved quite reliable in this role, Theodore M. Greene's introductory essay set the tone for its reception into the field of Kant interpretation. His essay certified Webb's moral interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion and dismissed Caird's interpretation. Instead of providing a balanced overview of the various ways one might read *Religion*, Greene simply prescribed the two-realm approach as the only legitimate way of reading Kant on religion. Webb's book and Greene's essay served to catalyze the trend toward what would later be called the traditional interpretation of Kant.

In the years leading up to the contemporary discussion of Kant's philosophy of religion that began, as we will argue below, with the publication of Allen Wood's *Kant's Moral Religion* (1970) and Michel Despland's *Kant on History and Religion* (1973), numerous publications and debates centering on the two- and three-realm interpretations dominated the field of Kant studies. An interesting comparison, typical of this period, can be made between the interpretations of Richard Kroner in *Kant's Weltanschauung* (1956) and Stephan Körner in *Kant* (1955). For Kroner, "Two great cultural powers are at the very foundation of the Kantian philosophy: natural science and moral life. The manner in which Kant pits these two powers against each other constitutes the dynamics of his system. For in their reality he sees the foci around which all philosophical thought moves, and he regards it as of the utmost importance to co-ordinate the two within a system." Kroner carried the theme of dualism throughout his interpretation of Kant's writings, seeing in them a complex system of dualisms based upon the scientific and moral emphases of the first two *Critiques*. This aspect of his interpretation permeates his view of theology as well. He writes,

God, and God alone, knows the full truth at a glance. He alone knows himself, the world, and the soul. Man knows only the Idea of God, the world, and the soul. It is

this which constitutes the inevitable and definitive limitation of human knowledge.

One can say that the entire separation of object and subject as well as that of theoretical and practical reason is only human; in the comprehension of God it does not exist. How far this comprehension can be fathomed by us is a difficult question.

Kroner's understanding of the dualisms in Kant's philosophy captures the radical difference between the divine and human standpoints. For him, Kant's prolegomena to metaphysics ends there, and the only way to say more is to move to Kant's practical philosophy.

Körner, on the other hand, held to a three-part view of Kant's philosophy. According to him, "The Critiques of theoretical and practical reason are a systematic survey of a priori principles of empirical knowledge and of morality. They are not the whole system and not even the whole outline of the critical philosophy. ... Another Critique had to be thought out and written by Kant." Körner understood Kant to be holding to a close connection between morality and religion. Yet, he argued for the possibility of a "rational faith" that is more than just morality in the writings of Kant. It proceeds from a required connection between nature and freedom found in a separate realm.

[T]he two *Critiques* have prepared the ground for an act of faith which is in harmony with the findings of his critical philosophy. It can in this sense be called a rational faith. According to Kant it is rational also in the sense that it satisfies "an interest of pure reason", namely the connexion between the realms of nature and of moral freedom. However difficult it may be to understand Kant's notion of rational faith, he leaves us with no doubt that it is different from the apprehension either of the moral law or of the world of empirical fact. It belongs to the sphere of religion.

Körner highlights the importance of faith and the role of the third *Critique* for providing harmony among the critical components of the program. However, he does not elaborate on the possibility of

a link between these two aspects. For Körner, Kant's philosophy of religion is distinct from his ethics in that it provides the vital unifying function. Nevertheless, it remains an enigmatic feature of Kant's thought; its only definitive place, "the realm of faith," remains outside the confines of standard philosophical dialogue.

A way forward between these conflicting interpretive schemes is hinted at in several of the better surveys of the history of modern philosophy during this period. Frederick Copleston's *History of Philosophy* (1963) captured many of the intricacies in Kant's understanding of religion. Copleston understood that, even though "morality, for Kant, does not presuppose religion," it does "lead to religion." This leading to religion does not side-step the question of hope and the third *Critique*, however. For Copleston,

The moral law commands us to make ourselves worthy of happiness rather than be happy or make ourselves happy. But because virtue should produce happiness, and because this completion of the *summum bonum* can be achieved only through divine agency, we are entitled to hope for happiness through the agency of God whose will, as a holy will, desires that His creatures should be worthy of happiness, while, as an omnipotent will, it can confer this happiness on them.

Copleston links religion and morality in Kant for reasons deeper than the reduction of one to the other. Religion involves faith and hope and the possibility of an actual God who is capable of making a difference in the lives of rational creatures. He summarizes his understanding of religion for Kant in the following way: "We can say, therefore, that Kant's interpretation of religion was moralistic and rationalistic in character. At the same time this statement can be misleading. For it suggests that in the content of true religion as Kant understands it every element of what we may call piety toward God is missing. But this is not the case." Copleston's interpretation points out the

interpretive dangers of explaining religion in terms of any single aspect of Kant's philosophy.

James Collins, in his *Interpreting Modern Philosophy* (1972), identifies the primary problem in achieving a consensus of opinion amongst Kant scholars and a more balanced approach to interpreting Kant's philosophy in general. In discussing the Kant conferences typical of his era, he highlights the limits of their scopes. Collins writes,

When a seminar centers around the philosophy of Kant, this further effort at unification is seen to be demanded both by the source thinker's own theme of the systematic unity of reason, examined in its several modalities, and by the difficult, partial perspectives opened up along the main routes. The seminar members are likely to feel, toward the close of their research, that they are well acquainted with this or that parcel of Kant's arguments but that a sense of the wholeness of his mind still eludes them.

According to Collins, Kant scholarship lost the interpretive art of locating the smooth transition between writings in Kant's thought and the sense of wholeness that this recognition affords. "Whereas every preliminary survey moves easily from one *Critique* to the next—from theory of knowledge and metaphysics to ethics and esthetics, and to theory of history and religion—this movement of tranquil passage becomes the first victim of the advanced Kant seminar."

Collins' helpful summary points a way forward in trying to understand Kant's philosophy of religion in relation to his other critical writings:

For Kant as philosopher of religion, the community of persons is not only practical and ethical but also religious. Respect for the interpersonal community can be lost or deliberately attacked, or else confused with those affective states which enjoy intense peaks but show little staying power of a moral quality. Hence the Kantian foundation

laying of the ethical relationship among persons leads, by its own internal dynamism and the stresses of the human condition, toward a religious interpretation of the human community.

Collins here captures a more complete sense of Kant's religious emphasis on a moral kingdom under God held together by a common faith in God's providential plan in history. His interpretation of Kant had been worked out in greater detail in his book *The Emergence of Philosophy of Religion* (1967). There, Collins had made important distinctions between *empirical* and *rational* theologies in Kant's use of the phrase "natural theology" and *informal* and *philosophical* theologies in Kant's understanding of "rational theology." These are elements of Kant's thought specifically highlighted in his *Religion and Conflict*. Collins' key insight, however, is his recognition of hope as an important concept for religion. What may I hope? "is a purposive and religious type of inquiry, which Kant begins in the *Critique of Judgment*, continues in his briefer writings on the meaning of history, and brings to a climax in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*."

One of the most important contributions to recent Kant scholarship is Michel Despland's *Kant on History and Religion* (1973). In Despland's words, his book attempts to "bring out the full meaning of Kant's philosophy of religion not primarily through the study of his views on morality and on the source of the moral law, but rather through the study of his views on the philosophy of history and on the problems of theodicy." His interpretation resists the temptation to understand Kant's philosophy of religion solely from the point of view of his three *Critiques*, not by rejecting the traditional interpretation outright, but by emphasizing the development of Kant's thought into insights and perspectives unique to his later work. If Webb's *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* marked a turning point in the history of Kant interpretation, then we could say that Despland's book marks a *returning* point. He fleshes out the concepts of community and hope in Kant's philosophy of religion,

and, in so doing, relieves much of the stress on Kant's moral philosophy for interpreting his philosophy of religion.

Grace and revelation, in Despland's reading of *Religion*, act as necessary supplements to the human striving after goodness and a perfect moral kingdom. In *Religion*, as Despland points out, the church plays a vital role in humankind's progression toward a perfect moral kingdom. The purifying and reforming of humankind via the church are made possible, on the one hand, by "reason as the focus that draws and attracts," and, on the other hand, by "revelation and grace [which are] the dynamic realities that move man along this progressive path." According to Despland, Kant's posture with regard to religion is one of reform. His interpretation liberates Kant's philosophy of religion from the other philosophical spheres, and shows that it contributes to the unification of the whole of his philosophy by regulating and chastening theology so that religion may in the end fulfill its proper function. For Kant, reason and revelation are neither capable of nor warranted in dismissing the other. The key insight, according to Despland's view of Kant's philosophy of religion, is that a healthy interchange between the two is beneficial for both philosophy and religion.

Despland's interpretation marks the return of a dispute in contemporary Kant scholarship between two distinct ways of interpreting Kant's philosophy. By arguing persuasively for a more nuanced and affirmative interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion, his work has opened the door for new dialogue over precisely how to understand the relationship of Kant's philosophy and theology in all its manifestations. Despland summarizes his position as follows:

The whole thrust of my interpretation leads to one conclusion: the superiority of moral theism is to be found not in the purely moral but in religious considerations as well.... Its merit lies in the fact that it gives meaning to faith which makes of faith an act which is both rational and religious. Faith is the free and personal act of

affirmation which struggles against the split (inside the self and outside of it) between what is and what ought to be.

His arguments demonstrate that the traditional interpretation of Kant is too restrictive and that the road to a more theologically affirmative reading is both promising and complex. Kant's writings on religion and theology are certainly reliant upon the moral philosophy, but, more than this, they demonstrated a definite and positive intention to render the tenets of empirical Christianity meaningful, while assimilating elements of hope from the third *Critique*, and leaving partially unresolved, from the perspective of reason alone, questions regarding revelation and religious experience. Revelation, for instance, cannot be a source of empirical knowledge, but it may be considered as a potential source of "knowing," not in the strict sense of the union of intuition and concept according to the theoretical philosophy, but in a sense made possible by a reasonable faith.

First published around the same time as Despland's book, Allen Wood's *Kant's Moral Religion* presents another influential account of Kant's philosophy of religion. Its importance for our discussion is that, like Despland, Wood defends the claim that there is rational room, and perhaps even need, for the belief in revelation and grace in Kant's philosophy of religion. According to Wood, "Kant does not dogmatically *deny* the possibility of a divine revelation to man," even if knowing that God has revealed himself is another matter entirely. He also makes the crucial point that "Trust in God's forgiving grace...is an important aspect of moral faith, and it is itself justified in the *Religion*." He highlights Kant's assertions never to contest the "inner possibility of revelation" and "the necessity of a revelation as a divine means for the introduction of religion" as proof of this contention. However, a tension exists in Wood's reading that is absent in Despland. For Wood, Kant's theoretical and practical philosophies combine to create a kind of antinomy in Kant's account of religion. He explains it in this way: "But though divine revelation itself is not possible [sic], it is

impossible for any man to know through experience that God has in any instance actually revealed himself.” Kant’s critical decision not to dismiss the possibility of revelation makes for an uneasy tension with his theoretical philosophy. Is it both possible for God to be *revealed* and impossible to know it was God?

Wood’s analysis of this apparent contradiction focuses on the distinction in Kant between “inner” revelation and “outer” revelation. He links the former to morality, saying it serves as a “touchstone” for any understanding of “genuine revelation.” The latter has to do with empirical religion and Kant’s theoretical philosophy. Wood’s interpretation in *Kant’s Moral Religion* resonates with the two-realm understandings of Kant in its almost exclusive focus on the theoretical and moral dimensions of Kant’s philosophy of religion. Yet, there is no *prima facie* reason why the concepts of taste, teleology, and history should be excluded at this crucial juncture. Wood’s interpretation of Kant’s philosophy of religion parallels Despland’s with the exception that Despland puts more emphasis on the historical dimension in Kant’s writings on religion and views *Religion* as a complex and interwoven nexus of perspectives germane to Kant’s entire philosophy. For instance, Kant certainly believed God could not reveal himself solely to a person’s understanding or to the theoretical faculty of sense experience, but in light of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and later writings, whether Kant believed revelation of God to be impossible in any conceivable sense and for any conceivable reason is not nearly so clear.

Wood’s tentatively optimistic position about Kant on revelation has gradually given way to a traditional, more pessimistic position. In his essay “Kant’s Deism,” for instance, Wood argues that Kant’s intention was to transform Christianity into rational religion, “includ[ing] as much as possible of it within the religion of pure reason.” Wood adopts the position that, for Kant, historical religion is derivative of rational religion, and rational religion likewise relies exclusively on Kant’s practical

philosophy. In Wood's interpretation, as it develops in the years following *Kant's Moral Religion*, religion becomes essentially an expression of morality. The primary exegetical evidence that Wood forwards in his article is based on a passage where Kant lays out the four logical positions—the “rationalist,” “pure rationalist,” “naturalist,” and “supernaturalist”—that may be adopted toward revelation (see *Religion* 154-155). Wood argues in short order that “Kant is plainly a rationalist because he is simply an agnostic about supernatural revelation.” More affirmative interpretations, by contrast, argue that Kant would have to be considered a pure rationalist, for “The point of dispute can therefore concern only the reciprocal claims of the pure rationalist and the supernaturalist in matters of faith, or what either accepts as necessary and sufficient, or only as accidental, to the one and only true religion” (155).

One of the main reasons the traditional interpretation has been under increasing attack in recent years is that it lacks a comprehensive account of the whole of Kant's philosophy. At the beginning of *Kant's Moral Religion*, Wood notes well the dilemma of the traditional interpretation: “Much careful and fruitful labor has been devoted to the analysis of the subtle argumentation of Kant's epistemology and moral philosophy; but his philosophical outlook as a whole, his view of the world and man's place in it, is often grotesquely caricatured.” He follows that comment with an outline of the solution: “there is an area of Kant's philosophical thought—itself badly neglected by responsible scholarship—which though no less demanding on the reader than most of his writing, does give us a more or less direct access to Kant's outlook as a whole. ... This area of thought is Kant's investigation of rational religious faith.” Like Despland, Wood highlights a problem with the traditional view and outlines a number of key features to be considered by any plan that might address this problem. Despland's subsequent work, however, never follows up on these features, and

Wood, rather than developing the implications of the insights of his early work, has gradually moved closer and closer to the traditional interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion.

Subsequent to the seminal works of Wood and Despland, efforts at interpreting Kant in a theologically affirmative and exegetically justifiable way have come in many different forms. On the basis of the foregoing analysis of historic interpretations of Kant's philosophy of religion and in anticipation of §2 of this Introduction, we can make two preliminary observations. First, the arguments arise out of and are centered on one dimension of Kant's philosophical program that is taken to provide for the critical incorporation of theological and religious discourse; second, one or two of Kant's texts, not including the first *Critique*, are understood to provide the primary arguments for the respective interpretation. The interpretations of Ronald Green, Adina Daviodovich, and Stephen Palmquist represent three very different, theologically affirmative interpretations of Kant that serve as good illustrations. If the above analysis has been correct so far, these three interpretations are a part of an under-recognized and under-appreciated tradition of Kant interpretation and need to be consolidated if the theologically affirmative interpretations are ever to be united and thus capitalize on their collective resurgence in the tradition. These three specific examples will serve as helpful preparation for the detailed analysis of the history of interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion over the last thirty years in the next section.

Green's interpretation comes the closest of our contributors to the traditional interpretation. Green's version of the moral hypothesis, however, argues for a theological opening in Kant's philosophy of the first *Critique* that is foreign to the traditional interpretation. The opening, or what Green calls "an aperture," is only made apparent by the internal logic of practical reason as articulated in the arguments of Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason*. The reciprocal relationship between moral reasoning and this theoretical aperture

in Kant's philosophy, Green argues, makes meaningful theological reflection and religious experience possible. Davidovich focuses not on Kant's second *Critique*, but on his third, the *Critique of Judgment*, making the case that the faculty of judgment became, for Kant, reason's most important faculty. Religion, in her view, became an expression of Kant's understanding of human teleological reasoning leading to what she calls "contemplative faith." Palmquist presents a third interpretation. He contends that Kant's philosophy is best construed as a system of three philosophical standpoints united by a single overarching Perspective. His interpretation involves the assumption that Kant's entire philosophical project, as illustrated most explicitly in his writings on religion and his posthumous works, constitutes what could be called a "critical mysticism." We have access to God, and thus can speak and think meaningfully about God, because reason must finally engage the mystery of being in the world and it must do this in accord with its overarching Transcendental Perspective. The purpose of this book is to provide a platform for interpretations like these that have responded to Wood's call for more responsible scholarship in the area of rational religious faith. In his or her own way, each contributor has taken up the challenge left in the wake of the early work of Wood and Despland. In §2 of this Introduction, Stephen Palmquist will detail the contribution we hope the essays in this volume will make to the continuing debate between traditional and affirmative interpreters of Kant.

2. From Despland to the New (Kantian) Philosophy of Religion (Stephen R. Palmquist)

The ground-breaking books by Allen Wood (in 1970) and Michel Despland (in 1973), both written near the beginning of their careers (in their late 20s and mid-30s, respectively) laid a foundation for the mushrooming of scholarship in the area of Kant's philosophy of religion that has transpired during the subsequent thirty years. Interestingly, however, neither scholar has taken his

initial efforts much further in the direction of developing a comprehensive alternative to the traditional interpretation he so effectively challenged in his early work. Wood has become one of the world's leading Kant scholars, but has done little, if any, original new work on Kant's theology or philosophy of religion since 1978 (see note 57, above). Instead, his Kant studies (aside from his substantial contributions to the *Cambridge Edition* of Kant's collected works) have focused mainly on ethics, with his treatment of theological and religious issues gradually moving closer to the traditional interpretation he had initially questioned. Although Despland's scholarly interests have led him down different paths, focusing mainly on the interface between religion and literature, he, by contrast, still embraces and supports the affirmative interpretation of his youth (as his Foreword to this volume clearly indicates).

Despite the founders' lack of sustained support for the affirmative interpretation they initiated, the past thirty years have seen the appearance of a growing number of scholars who *have* taken up the challenge to develop this new way of interpreting Kant, mostly in the form of journal articles numbering in the hundreds. The remainder of this Introduction will not attempt to sketch this trend in anything like an exhaustive way, but will merely take note of the books that have been published on (or have dealt in a major way with) Kant's theology and/or philosophy of religion. This will provide ample evidence of how widespread the recognition is becoming among scholars actually working in this field that the traditional interpretation is neither the only nor the best alternative available.

During the two decades following Despland's 1973 publication, a crucial new development in Kant-interpretation provided previously unavailable fertile ground for the development of an affirmative interpretation in the areas of theology and philosophy of religion: a new, perspective-oriented hermeneutic, focused mainly on Kant's theoretical philosophy, demonstrated that some of

Kant's most frequently rejected theories (such as the distinction between the thing in itself and appearances) make much more sense than most interpreters have appreciated. The first representatives (in English) of this new trend were Graham Bird in the UK and Henry Allison in the USA. Although they themselves have written very little about Kant's philosophy of religion, they developed a strategy for dealing with Kant's theoretical philosophy that enables the reader to see far more clearly the coherence between its various aspects. During my doctoral work in the early 1980s (initially before learning of the work of Bird and Allison), I adopted the same perspectival emphasis, and for the remainder of that decade I applied it for the first time to the interpretation of Kant's entire philosophical system. This perspectival approach to interpreting Kant gave those interested in developing a more affirmative interpretation of Kant's philosophy of religion a promising philosophical basis for attempting to take the initial insights of Despland and Wood a step (or more) further, even though in their own subsequent publications the two ground-breakers themselves have not taken advantage of the great potential for added clarity and coherence provided by a perspectival interpretation.

The 1970s and 1980s were slow in this respect, with most new books on Kant's philosophy of religion still reflecting an almost exclusive acceptance of the traditional interpretation and little or no recognition of any alternative(s). Two books showed more affinity with Despland's emphasis on history than with Wood's more existentialist leanings, but were both far more dismissive of Kant as providing any grounding for serious theological reflection. In 1975, Carl Raschke's *Moral Action, God, and History in the Thought of Immanuel Kant* portrayed Kant as eventually reducing theology to philosophy of history and virtually doing away with the need for any real God. But the best example of this backward-looking approach was Gordon Michalson's 1979 book, *The Historical Dimensions of a Rational Faith*, because he followed it in the 1990s with two sequels that have

shown no greater openness to an affirmative reading of Kant. The great exception in the second half of the 1970s was Ronald Green's *Religious Reason*, the first book to go beyond Wood in its affirmation of Kant as a viable religious thinker worthy of adopting as the basis for a full-fledged theological system of belief. With Green (whose essay in the present volume appropriately appears in the part focusing on theology) the birth of an unequivocally affirmative way of interpreting Kant's philosophy of religion was finally complete.

After a gap of some six years extending throughout the first half of the 1980s, a spate of books appeared in the second half of the decade that were progressively more promising in their emphasis, though none of them adopted an approach as thoroughly affirmative as Green's. Ann Loades picked up and developed Despland's emphasis on Kant's theodicy essay in her 1985 book, *Kant and Job's Comforters*, where she compares Kant's early optimistic views on God to those of Job's naïve comforters. Portraying the critical philosophy as having a religiously *healthy* influence on Kant's theological outlook, she focuses mainly on the negative side of this development, without acknowledging the full extent of Kant's construction of a new religious and theological path. Vincent McCarthy's 1986 book, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus*, expounds on the distinctiveness of Kant's *Religion*, from both an historical and a literary point of view, giving special emphasis to Kant's portrayal of Christianity as the best example of an historical religion and of Jesus as "practically indispensable in view of man's self-inflicted moral condition...". However, McCarthy overlooks many of Kant's affirmations, complaining (for example) that Kant has "dissolved" most of Christianity's most substantial doctrines and that any notion of religious experience is wholly absent in Kant's portrayal of religion. Two books that appeared in 1988 both gave credit to Kant as a viable religious thinker; however, both also fell short of viewing his approach as fully compatible with that of a living religious (especially Christian) faith. Heinrich Cassirer's *Grace and Law* is important not

only because it was written by the son of the great Kant scholar, Ernst Cassirer, but also because its comparison of Kant with St. Paul comes in a book addressed explicitly to a *religious* (non-philosophical, Christian) readership. Bernard Reardon's *Kant as Philosophical Theologian*, by contrast, carries out a scholarly, book-by-book commentary on *Religion*, concluding that the elements of Kant's philosophy "do not present a consistent whole"; the religious and theological questions Kant raises were either "unanswered or answered unsatisfactorily by himself". These books were followed in 1989 by one that took fully on board the significance of hermeneutics for Kant: Terry Godlove's *Religion, Interpretation and Diversity of Belief* convincingly demonstrated that the common assumption that Kant's philosophy leads to anti-religious forms of relativism is utterly mistaken.

The 1990s witnessed a veritable burgeoning of works challenging the traditional interpretation, with Michalson's two (see note 70, above) being the only books devoted solely to Kant's philosophy of religion that continued to lend it support. During this decade, the contributors to the present volume have been among the most active supporters of various affirmative approaches to interpreting Kant. In the first half of the 1990s, four books appeared that were all devoted to an explanation and analysis of Kant's philosophy of hope, with special emphasis on religion as the domain where hope is realized most fully. Gene Fendt's *For What May I Hope?* (1990) is cast in a Kierkegaardian frame of reference and appeared just before the veritable explosion of books over the next decade that interpreted Kantian religion affirmatively. Perhaps as a result, its affirmations are somewhat tentative at times. Nevertheless, his two chapters on Kant do affirm the centrality of hope for Kant and highlight its religious significance. The very fact that Fendt (writing before Green's definitive 1992 comparison) links Kant with Kierkegaard, widely respected as a philosopher with deep insights into the nature and meaning of religion, may have served as a "wake up call" to many

(especially Christian) philosophers. Fendt's tantalizing suggestion is that Kant may not be so much the antithesis as the *complement* of Kierkegaard in the realm of philosophical theology and religious philosophy.

Of the four books published during this half decade, the late Adina Davidovich's *Religion as a Province of Meaning* (1993) focused least (despite its title) on Kant's *Religion*. Instead, the first half of Davidovich's book focuses on the third *Critique*, employing it as the systematic lens for viewing "a contemplative conception of religion". The second half shows how the religious theories of Rudolf Otto and Paul Tillich were developments out of precisely such a third-*Critique*-centered reading of Kant, whereby "belief in God is neither theoretical nor practical," but contemplative. Interestingly—and perhaps revealing a weakness in her position—Davidovich claims Kant "failed" in *Religion* to apply properly his own insights on hope from the third *Critique*, thus leaving the task of developing a truly Kantian theory of religion to others. But she affirms that her interest in all the scholars who form what she calls the "Kantian school" of religion is more than just academic; rather, she is motivated by the conviction that "they have something to say that is important for us to hear."

The next book, Curtis H. Peters' *Kant's Philosophy of Hope* (also in 1993) argues that Kant's philosophy of religion is not only the expression of a "philosophy of hope," but that this expression is *complete* and "realistic," serving as "an integral part of his general critical philosophy." Peters' study is the most wide-ranging of the four studies during this period, examining hope in each of the *Critiques*, and in Kant's philosophy of history, as well as in *Religion*. Chapter 3 examines Kant's view of religion thoroughly, concluding that the "fullest development and expression" of hope was here "in his philosophy of religion." The chapter thus ends with an long and impressive account of what Kant got *right* about religion, followed by a much shorter (though serious) set of criticisms. Although Peters' final assessment is that Kant had "too narrow a perspective on religion," he

nevertheless sees it as being filled with “valuable insights” that ought to have continued influence even today.

In the following year, Sidney Axinn published *The Logic of Hope*, the book (among these four that appeared in the first half of the decade) that gives the most sustained and careful analysis of Kant’s *Religion*. Axinn is more cautious in his affirmations, but this is largely because of Axinn’s own conviction that *ambivalence* is the most philosophically respectable attitude to adopt in matters religious. One of Kant’s key insights, according to Axinn, was precisely that ambivalence is religiously *healthy*. Understanding the nature of ignorance is therefore the key to delineating the realms of what we can and cannot hope to know. After a chapter providing a section by section commentary on *Religion*, Axinn offers an excellent (though not strictly Kantian) logical analysis of the nature of hope. Hope requires both knowledge and ignorance in a peculiar interplay. “God,” according to Axinn, is a concept that can be “mentioned” but cannot be “used”. As a result, he sees Kant in the end (Chapter Eleven) as an historical reductionist: for Kant “the philosophy of religion is essentially the philosophy of history.” Kantian religion as Axinn portrays it is so tightly squeezed between ethics and history that little, if any, room is left for anything distinctively religious or theological. As befits his own conception of philosophical integrity, Axinn therefore remains ambivalent about whether he is affirming or negating Kant’s position.

Six other books that appeared during the 1990s and exhibited varying degrees of awareness of the affirmative interpretation are also worth mentioning briefly. Wisniewski’s *Our Natural Knowledge of God* (1990) develops an approach to natural theology that affirmative interpreters will recognize as highly Kantian, yet Wisniewski himself is so entrenched in the traditional way of reading Kant that he sees himself as *rejecting* Kant’s position. Lowe’s *Theology and Difference* (1993) by contrast, offered a highly affirmative application of Kant to various postmodern themes, affirming

Kant's emphasis on the absolute difference between God and human beings, as well as his treatment of radical evil, as a good example of the "wound of reason," the brokenness of the human condition that all genuine theology must grapple with. Dole's 1993 translation of Florschütz's work on Swedenborg amassed substantial proof (incontrovertible, for those who dare consider it!) that Swedenborg exercised far more influence on Kant than had previously been assumed by most scholars. Dell'Oro's *From Existence to the Ideal* (1994) questioned another sacred cow by arguing against the "discontinuity thesis"—that mainstay of the traditional interpretation that assumes Kant experienced "a radical transformation" around the years 1768-1772—claiming instead that his philosophical approach in general and his theological/religious thought in particular "evolved slowly over time," always revolving around the problem of how the concept of "existence" relates to our understanding of God. Morrison's *Science, Theology, and the Transcendental Horizon* (1994) is plagued by an unqualified acceptance of the "two *Critiques*" version of the traditional interpretation, thus leading to many claims that simply cannot stand up against the weight of current Kant-scholarship, such as that Kant single-handedly "killed God" by relegating him to the status of a mere "metaphysical idea," a deistic "creature of reason's own thought." This "latter day" adoption of the traditional interpretation, together with Michalson's 1990 and 1999 books (see note 70, above), make all the more remarkable the fact that most of Fackenheim's *The God Within* (1996) was originally written in the 1950s, yet it portrays Kant in a highly affirmative way, arguing against many of the misunderstandings perpetrated by the traditional interpretation: the key is to view "Kant's 'theology' or 'metaphysics' [as] a new *kind* of metaphysics"; for "it appears as confused and inconsistent only so long as it is mistaken for the old kind." In addition to the above, the decade of the 1990s saw the appearance of numerous other books, relating only indirectly to Kant's philosophy of religion, yet supporting the same general type of affirmative approach that stands in such sharp contrast to the

traditional interpretation.

During the five year period from 1996 to 2000, four of the twelve contributors to the present volume published books that developed affirmative interpretations of Kant's theology and/or philosophy of religion with a new boldness, taking it to a level of scholarly understanding that was heretofore unparalleled. As we have already seen (cf. notes 71 and 79), two other contributors, Green (1978, 1988, and 1992) and Fendt (1990), had already published books adopting affirmative stances, but neither had been as well developed as in these latest books. Because each of these authors already has an opportunity to speak in his or her own voice elsewhere in this volume, I shall here give only a brief comment on each book. In 1996 Hare's *The Moral Gap* (see note 54, above) argued that religion performs a necessary function in Kant's philosophical system by providing human beings with a way of overcoming our fundamental inability to fulfill the strict demands of the moral law. Also in 1996 Galbraith's *Kant and Theology* went a step further by demonstrating that Kant very consciously aspired to construct a systematically complete *philosophical theology*, even though (perhaps because of the expectations imposed by his cultural and intellectual context) he seemed to be covering up this aim until near the end of his life. In 1997 Kielkopf's *A Kantian Condemnation of Atheistic Despair* applies pragmatic arguments in the manner of William James in order to strengthen Kant's case for "moral autonomy" as a means of establishing a "rational, moral religious perspective" that can serve as a foundation for "genuine religion." And in 2000, this editor's (Palmquist's) *Kant's Critical Religion* applied the perspectival hermeneutic established in his earlier book, *Kant's System of Perspectives* (1993), to demonstrate that the human encounter with God served as the key (though in a sense, "mystical") focal point focal for Kant's entire philosophical project.

The main weakness of the many scholars who have now participated in the development of

this new, affirmative school of Kant-interpretation is that most have so far failed to take full advantage of the wealth of secondary literature supporting their position. Instead, they devote more attention in their writings to arguing against interpreters who accept the traditional interpretation than to giving supportive citations of those who agree with their own position—as if such an acknowledgement might make their “discovery” of an alternative way of reading Kant appear to be less original. Or perhaps this tendency is just an expression of the broader fact that philosophers are generally quick to admit (and explain why) they disagree with philosophers who oppose their position but reluctant to admit (and explain why) they agree with those sharing compatible positions. Be that as it may, this volume is a concerted effort to counter-act such tendencies. The editors hope is that when those scholars who still sit on the borderline between the traditional interpretation and its affirmative alternative see the direction this trend is clearly heading, they will be less reluctant to accept the new paradigm that views Kantian theology and religion in an affirmative light. The scholars included in this volume are certainly among the best representatives of this new paradigm, though numerous others could also have been included, given how popular this movement has become in recent years. The remainder of this Introduction will provide an overview of each of the twelve essays in this volume, and conclude by sketching four ongoing *disagreements* between proponents of the affirmative interpretation—issues that indicate promising new avenues for further research and debate, notwithstanding the substantial common ground shared by the contributors.

Part One, on the philosophical foundations for an affirmative theology, opens with an essay by Gregory R. Johnson, demolishing what may be the most influential obstacle preventing many readers from considering even the *possibility* that Kant might have approved of the religious life of most ordinary believers: namely, the fact that Kant’s harsh rejection of “enthusiasm” seems to reveal that he was psychologically averse to all religion, summarily condemning it to the graveyard of

“fanaticism.” Johnson’s essay on “The Tree of Melancholy”—a natural outworking of his numerous other publications on the formative influence Swedenborg had on Kant—traces the development of Kant’s view of enthusiasm from his early writings through his mature Critical philosophy. While Johnson admits Kant is ambivalent about the problems posed by enthusiasm in religious matters, he persuasively accounts for the fact that Kant himself had a lifelong fascination for these very issues. A close look at Kant’s anthropology reveals that Kant believed enthusiasm and philosophy both derive from “the same melancholic temperament.” In short, on Kant’s account, “philosophy and enthusiasm are close kin. Both are fruits of the tree of melancholy.” Furthermore, “[o]f all of the fruits of melancholy, ... philosophy and enthusiasm are the closest...”. What this means is that philosophers cannot reject all enthusiasm whatsoever without severing the root that nourishes their own discipline! Religious enthusiasm may die out as a result of the way Kant’s philosophy of religion has traditionally been interpreted; but in that event, so too will everything that is most valuable and humane about philosophy itself; for the archetypal philosopher’s personality *shares* the very same melancholic temperament that naturally gives rise to enthusiasm.

For those who have come to adopt the traditional interpretation of Kant, Johnson’s demonstration that Kant was far from condemning all forms of enthusiasm may be met with shocked disbelief. Yet the evidence is incontrovertible: the fact that many, if not most, forms of living religious faith seem to encourage, if not *require*, just such a grounding in feeling and experience (what Green’s essay in Part Two associates with Kierkegaard’s “ethico-religious passion”) can no longer be regarded as grounds for regarding them as contrary to Kant’s understanding of critically enlightened religion. Quite to the contrary, the “tree” of our rational nature, rightly understood (in terms of the three *Critiques*), inevitably gives rise (for any thoughtful person) to melancholy: for we cannot immediately see how it can be that we might “climb” it without assistance—i.e., how we can

overcome the limits reason places on our knowledge and on our ability to accomplish our moral duty. These two challenges are therefore taken up in the next two essays.

The second essay, by John E. Hare, carefully analyzes “the rational instability of atheism” from a Kantian point of view. After examining Kant’s views on morally good people who are not theists, Hare discusses Kant’s moral *criticism* of atheism. He then responds to scholars such as Wood, who interpret various statements of Kant’s as implying that religion does not require a belief that God exists. If Hare is right, then atheism fails to fulfill one very important role that Kant requires any religious philosophy to fulfill: it fails to provide a stable means of “standing in the gap” that opens up between our moral nature and our (in)ability to fulfill the demands it makes on us—a theme Hare develops more fully in his 1996 book, *The Moral Gap*. Hare’s fourth section gives a brief account of how he thinks Kant believed Christianity, regarded as a morally centered theistic religion, can provide an effective means of standing in this gap. He concludes his paper with some challenging comments on what happens if we attempt to do Kantian ethics *without* theism.

Once the misconception that atheistic moralism can serve as a legitimate surrogate of Kantian religion is cleared up, the way is prepared for an attack on yet another obstacle that commonly leads readers to downplay the theological significance of Kant’s philosophy: R. Christopher McCammon challenges head on a claim that tends to function as the foundation of the traditional interpretation, that Kant is defending a form of *deism*. In demonstrating how this common assumption can (and should) be overcome, McCammon argues against the claims of Wood, Wolterstorff, and others, portraying “hope incarnate” as a necessary feature in Kant’s understanding of rational religion. He interprets “the Christic archetype” as an essential component of Kant’s argument, one that requires rational religion to take a definite theistic stand for a *living* religious faith. Touching on the role of religious symbols in this process, McCammon’s essay prepares the

way not only for a Kantian Christology, but also for the kind of real religious hope that functions as the engine driving the religious life of most ordinary believers.

Part One closes with Gene Fendt's reflections, from a literary point of view, on the different modes of truth implicit in Kant's writings. This fourth and final step in our preliminary consideration of what it means to "make room for faith" (CPR Bxxx) demonstrates that religious thought (i.e., theology) and practice (i.e., religion) are not rendered inconsequential by the limits Kant places on knowledge in the first *Critique*. Once the "anatomy of truth" is rightly understood, we find ourselves fully equipped by Kant's philosophical system to discover and uphold truth-preferring reasons in religious and theological matters. Carrying further an argument he began in his 1990 book, *What May I Hope?*, Fendt demonstrates that, far from denying the possibility of a vibrant theology and a living faith, Kant's epistemology "presumes a kind of faith or trust all along the way." As such, Fendt's essay removes the final philosophical/hermeneutic obstacle that might stand in the way of developing a complete Kantian theology—one that can, in turn, ground the kind of genuine religious practice Kant seems to have envisioned. Despite common claims to the contrary (usually by those who are familiar only with a narrow cross-section of Kant's philosophy), Kantian religion *does* leave room for affirming the truth *and* reality of one's theological and religious commitments.

Part Two, on the theological foundations for interpreting Kantian religion affirmatively, begins with an essay by Philip J. Rossi's, originally written as an Epilogue to the whole book. As such, it contains some general reflections on the 1991 prequel (edited by Rossi and Wreen) as well as some brief commentary (mostly in the footnotes) on some of the other essays in this volume. However, Rossi's main message fits in so well with what the editors have dubbed the "affirmative interpretation" that we opted to reposition his essay (with the author's kind permission) as part of the book's main content. Its position as the first essay in Part Two is crucial because as a Catholic Priest,

Rossi relates the significance of this new hermeneutic to some of the oldest theological issues in the history of Christianity. In particular, Rossi appeals to some recent work by the Catholic philosopher, Jacqueline Mariña, to argue that Kant's understanding of divine grace is far closer to that of St. Augustine than it is to Pelagianism (an accusation all-too-frequently leveled against Kant by those who take for granted the traditional interpretation of Kant). The key insight here is that grace, for Kant, consists not only of the "divine aid" necessary to extricate us from radical evil, but also of the fundamental fact that every human being starts out with a "good predisposition"—something that has nothing to do with our own efforts or actions, but is an unmerited gift of *receptivity* whose absence would leave us wholly incapable of experiencing divine grace. Rossi's essay undertakes an invaluable service to theologically-minded interpreters of Kant by showing how his crucial theological concept is not only present in Kant, but present in a way that can hold its own in dialogue with some of the mainstream classical and contemporary Catholic theologians.

The second essay in Part Two tackles a problem many traditional interpreters of Kant would regard as rendering *all* Kant's talk of grace (or anything else that smacks of theology) otiose: given the strictures laid down in the critical philosophy (especially the first *Critique*), how can Kant presume to talk meaningfully about God *at all*? Nathan Jacobs meets this common objection to Kantian theology head on by comparing two recent papers, by Nicholas Wolterstorff and Jeffrey Privette. Wolterstorff adopts the traditional interpretation to argue that any such reference to God is impossible on strict Kantian principles; Privette takes an affirmative approach, claiming under a perspectival interpretation of Kant's epistemology that Christian theology, rooted in Jesus Christ as God incarnate, has a basis for God-talk that survives the Kantian noumenal-phenomenal distinction. Jacobs forges a path between these two extremes by making a careful distinction between transcendental theology, and the limits of reference Kant does place on it in the first *Critique*, and

the special form of *incarnational* (or “prototypical”) theology Kant develops in Book Two of *Religion*. Privette’s position, though affirmative, is mistaken inasmuch as “the empirical manifestation can never be adequate to the idea of God;” nevertheless, Wolterstorff is also mistaken, for he wholly neglects Kant’s separate arguments for the transcendental necessity of the prototype of “perfect humanity.” This prototype, Jacobs argues, serves to establish the fundamental condition that makes possible human cognition of God; it alone, therefore, makes God-talk possible for Kant.

Next in Part Two comes Chris L. Firestone’s ground-breaking work on the essentially *optimistic* character of Kant’s philosophical approach to the discipline of theology. His essay—carrying on the work of his published articles on Kant—shows how both *Religion* and *Conflict* require an ongoing reciprocal relationship to exist between philosophy and theology, as the lower and higher “faculties” of the university. Far from doing away with the possibility or legitimacy of theological reflection, Kantian philosophy *requires* it, as an independent sounding board (or partner in dialogue) for its own religious aspirations. Firestone’s essay is written as a companion to Jacobs’ essay. Firestone agrees that Kant grounds theology in the rational/transcendental, but presses the argument further by focusing on the role of theology proper in Kant’s philosophy of religion. He argues that the discipline of theology (relative to philosophy) does have a distinct and significant role in Kant’s vision of “the university of learning.” He locates this role in the awaking and deepening influence of theology in the area of religious truth. After spelling out this role, Firestone concludes his essay by summarizing Kant’s rules for conflict as a model for how philosophers and theologians might fruitfully engage one another within the academy.

A good illustration of Firestone’s claim that Kant’s philosophy encourages constructive conflict with theologians comes in Ronald M. Green’s essay, an imaginary dialogue between Kant and Søren Kierkegaard. The two greats have both been “reanimated” thanks to the wonders of

modern technology and happen to meet each other as they wait out a snow delay in an airport lounge. The resurrected Kant has had a chance to acquaint himself with Kierkegaard's works, and strikes up a conversation about their respective views on historical faith. Kierkegaard is at pains throughout the conversation to emphasize how thoroughly he was influenced by Kant—a theme Green has explored in great detail in his 1992 book, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (see note 58, above). The futuristic Kant, in turn, offers various insights into the motives that led him to write his *Religion* and how he intended his views to be interpreted. The uncomfortable implications of our radical freedom in matters of both action and belief—quite irrespective, in certain respects, of what reason demands—are what Kant says prompted him to write a book on religion. Ethics on its own, he came to realize (as Kierkegaard later highlighted even more forcefully), is a futile pursuit. When asked a leading question about his apparent rejection of divine assistance, Kant explains how he does, in fact, lend support to just such a possibility: grace, for him, is essentially the same thing as willing, only viewed from a different perspective—a view Kierkegaard dubs *mystical*, without any denial coming from Kant. The second half of Green's paper depicts Kierkegaard taking up the offensive and arguing that Kant's own religious writings contain the seed of a philosophical justification for the very sort of historically-grounded faith that he (Kierkegaard) later attempted to develop. Kant is beginning to be convinced just as they are informed it is time to board their planes.

By pitting Kant the religiously-minded philosopher against Kierkegaard the philosophically-minded Christian theologian, this final paper in Part Two reflects a sentiment that is evident in virtually all the contributions in this book, especially those in Part Two. The editors' hope is that this collection of essays will convince the reader that Kant, no less than Kierkegaard, can be regarded as a religious reformer who deserves to be taken as seriously by Christian philosophers and theologians (and, indeed, by philosophically enlightened members of any religious or theological tradition) as is

Kierkegaard—if not more so. Green highlights the common concern these two great “Ks” had for establishing a grounding in “ethico-religious passion.” Each of the other essays in this volume highlights other features of Kant’s approach that, taken together, substantially confirm what might otherwise appear to be mere imaginative musings, were Green’s essay to be read on its own.

The four essays that constitute Part Three address various aspects of what a real Kantian religion might look like. The first essay clears a path for more specifically religious applications by examining the appropriateness of Kant’s tools for dealing with the most negative of all theological problems: evil (i.e., undeserved suffering). Elizabeth C. Galbraith picks up this theme as one that was left underdeveloped in her 1996 book, *Kant and Theology*. In that work, she interpreted Kant’s attitude towards theodicy as involving a break with Leibniz’ position, referring to the former as a “deferred theodicy.” According to this interpretation, Kant chooses to defer comprehension of evil, trusting that divine justice will ultimately prevail. In the present essay, Galbraith assesses how effectively Kant’s 1791 position on the problem of innocent suffering can inform post-holocaust theodicies, by comparing it with the “theodicy of protest” by the Christian theologian, John K. Roth. She concludes that Kant’s approach ultimately satisfies the religious protestor’s desire for justice, not in a rigorous philosophical (i.e., theoretical/theological) manner, but by demonstrating the need for religious *thinkers* to preserve a real living *experience* of the God they claim to write about.

In the second essay in Part Three, Charles F. Kielkopf picks up where Galbraith left off by setting up what he calls a “Soteriological Predicament” that arises out of Kant’s writings on morality and religion, then develops a Kantian model for solving this predicament through a “religion of deliverance.” Although his essay has clearly theological implications and uses some analytical argumentation along the way, its main thrust is to encourage what he calls “a type of personal religious thinking sometimes called ‘faith seeking understanding’”. Its function is to help individuals

appreciate claims of their religions.” This, too, is the purpose of the two concluding essays in Part Three: each addresses this possibility of religious application at a more concrete and personal level, demonstrating that Kantian religious philosophy is capable of providing meaningful theological structures that are effective and workable in the real context of a community of faith.

Along these lines, in the third essay in Part Three Leslie Stevenson testifies to his own commitment to British Quakerism, arguing that Kantian philosophy and Quaker faith and practice go hand in hand in a variety of ways. The claim that Quakerism represents the closest thing Christianity has to offer to Kant’s ideal of a pure moral faith is well worth considering by Christians and religious believers of all persuasions—if not to convert everyone to Quakerism, at least to point the direction in a concrete way to how other denominations and faiths would need to be revised in order to approach more closely to the Kantian ideal. Stevenson concludes by pointing out that the one reservation that could be raised by Quakers seeking to ground their faith and practice in Kant’s philosophy—viz., that it seems to offer little if any room for interpreting religious experience as a genuine experience of God (the very core of the Quaker tradition of Silent Meeting for Worship), an issue that is one of the deepest concerns many religious believers have about Kant—is largely unfounded, given the many hints Kant gives that such experience may be possible, as long as it is not viewed as producing *theoretical knowledge*.

The twelfth essay, coming fourth in Part Three, begins by clearing away one final misconception that tends to prevent readers (and sometimes nonreaders!) of Kant from taking seriously the relevance his ideas have for anyone who wishes to adopt a life of healthy and vibrant religious belief and practice. Kant tends to be portrayed as the epitome of all academic philosophers, the philosopher for whom the university was the sole context for carrying out the philosopher’s duties. Kant’s last book, *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), provides a highly significant window into

his most mature views on religion and theology; but it tends only to reinforce the notion that Kant did not take religion *as a way of life* very seriously, for the book seems to portray the philosopher's vocation as one of speaking only to other academics. Stephen R. Palmquist's essay starts out as a report on some of the key insights that arose during a philosophical retreat the author organized during the summer of 2002: five scholars, most of them contributors to this book, spent four intense days in the depths of the Mendocino forest, north of San Francisco, striving to understand Kant's *Conflict*. One of our most surprising conclusions was that Kant's account of the struggle between the "higher faculties" of the university and the "lower faculty" of philosophy implies *not* that philosophers are and ought to remain out of touch with the general public, but rather that they have both the responsibility and the duty to insure that the public is challenged by the voice of reason.

After offering a summary of the perspectival method of interpreting Kant's philosophy—as set out in detail in his 1993 book, *Kant's System of Perspectives*, and as applied to theology, religion, and religious experience in the 2000 sequel, *Kant's Critical Religion*—Palmquist's essay concludes with some brief suggestions as to how a recent movement, often called "philosophical practice," might relate to Kant's views on the philosopher's responsibility to the public. He suggests that the purest Kantian way of practicing religion would be to participate in religious groups, such as Quakerism, that do not require clergy at all but distribute the priestly role to all members. A more widely acceptable way of applying Kantian religion, Palmquist argues, would be to recognize and encourage the possibility of Kantian philosophers taking up the profession of *pastors*, yet without sacrificing their calling as philosophers. Because in some contexts this would put them under subjection to a church hierarchy, this would have the effect of reproducing aspects of the academic "conflict of the faculties" in the context of the church.

In a short Appendix to the twelfth and final essay, a philosophically-minded pastor of a parish

church in Berkeley, California, offers a synopsis of what can result when Kant's approach to philosophy and religion is interpreted poetically, as a *way of life*, and used to inform not only the beliefs and practices, but also the *government* of a religious community. Richard W. Mapplebeckpalmer weaves into his pastoral account of "Kant's Copernican Revolution in Religion" the symbols he has grown accustomed to using to enliven his own personal faith. Originally part of a much longer, seven-part manuscript, this Appendix merely highlights the main features of the first (theoretical) part on the grounding of church government in Kant's theory of religion. Only with a philosophically-sound constitution can religious communities be established without lapsing into ideological cults or separatist sects—two of Kant's greatest concerns. Part Two (not summarized) describes in greater detail how the religious community based at Grace North Church (having both Congregationalist and Anglican roots, but attracting participants from all manner of religious traditions) has evolved during the past two decades into a paradigm case, proving that Kantian religion can be practiced in a vibrant and living community of faith. When free from submission to cult or sect, the natural bonds of kinship and stewardship that characterize such a religious community become the means to the rational and universal religion that Kant commended.

The foregoing summary highlights the similarities and compatibilities between the contributors to this volume that led the editors to arrange the essays in a particular order, as if they were "telling one consistent story." This should not be taken to imply, however, that these (and other) affirmative interpreters of Kant's philosophy of religion agree with each other on *all* the issues. On the contrary, the editors themselves have disagreed, sometimes strongly, over such fundamental issues as what "counts" as an "affirmative interpretation". What we decided, in the end, is that any scholar who interprets Kant as *affirming* theology and/or religion *and* interprets that affirmation as a position *worthy of being affirmed* by theologians and/or religious believers belongs to the group or

trend we are presenting here. These two similarities may be the only features that unite *all* contributors to this volume and distinguish us from those interpreters of Kant who (a) think Kant was trying to negate theology (and/or destroy religion), and/or (b) agree that Kant was seeking to affirm theology (and/or religion) but regard that *kind* of affirmation as so dangerous that practicing theologians (and/or religious believers) ought to reject it. Since all philosophers should affirm the value of a good argument, the remainder of the Introduction will outline four broad areas of *disagreement* between different affirmative interpreters, as represented by the contributors to this volume.

First and perhaps foremost is the crucial issue of the role history plays in religion and theology. Rossi's essay notes that this issue also arose between contributors to the 1991 prequel of this volume. Some interpreters think Kant's view of reason as a non-historical faculty for obtaining timeless truth brackets history out of the picture, while others see Kant as merely giving reason the kind of stability a ring provides for the gem (the history) it shows off. Adopting an affirmative interpretation does not, on its own, presuppose one or the other of these options, largely because different kinds of theologians as well as different kinds of religious believers come to Kant with different presuppositions in this regard. Some (mainly those who align themselves closely with a particular tradition) *would not affirm Kant* if he were denying any significant role to history, while others (mainly those whose theology and religion is more ecumenical or non-sectarian) affirm Kant *precisely because* they believe he is doing something of this sort. What this means is that affirmative interpreters will sometimes strongly disagree with each other about what exactly is wrong with the traditional ways of interpreting Kant. Although such disagreements are not highlighted in this book, the perceptive reader will be able to detect differences between the contributors in this regard.

Green's essay tackles this issue head on, portraying the inner struggle any Kantian religious believer

(like Kierkegaard) is bound to have over the precise role given to history.

A second argument that is intensified rather than solved by adopting an affirmative interpretation is the related issue of whether Kant's approach to theology and religion aligns itself (or can be aligned) more closely with one particular religious tradition, or whether it *must* be non-sectarian and/or ecumenical. The fact that Kant himself openly states on numerous occasions that Christianity is the tradition he prefers would seem to mitigate against the latter option, especially in light of the sometimes rather uncharitable caricatures he gives of other traditions. Yet Kantian "moral religion" is *supposed* to be "universal", so the second option cannot simply be discarded without a thought. Traditional interpreters of Kant have rarely *cared* whether his position does or does not support one particular tradition. But affirmative interpreters *do care* about this issue, almost by definition (because they are affirming Kant!), so they are much more likely to argue over it. Within this volume we have representatives of both camps; and among the former, there are avowed Catholics (such as Rossi), various kinds of mainline Protestants (such as Hare and Galbraith), and advocates of more radical denominations (such as Stevenson, a Quaker). Corresponding to these differences is a wide range of preferences in theological disposition from very conservative to ultra-liberal. Would Kant himself, if he were (as Green imagines) brought back to life today, align more closely with one of these religious traditions than the others? Or would he simply encourage each tradition to do its best to transform itself into something that more closely resembles the ideal of moral religion? While this debate has previously been conducted in a mostly "hidden" way, with interpreters' views often discretely tucked into obscure footnotes, the publication of this volume should fan this spark into a flame of open and more rigorous debate.

Third among the many disagreements that remain not only unsettled but *intensified* by affirmative interpreters of Kant is the pair of (closely related) problems regarding *theological*

knowledge and *religious experience*. Does Kant allow room for us to *talk meaningfully* about God? What about *experiencing* God? Theologians are more likely to be concerned about the former, while ordinary religious believers tend to care more about the latter. The traditional interpretation typically portrays Kant as ruling out *both* of these crucial features; philosophers of religion have tended to reject Kant because most wish to preserve the legitimacy at least of knowledge, if not also of experience. Nearly all affirmative interpreters of Kant will portray him as enabling philosophers of religion to preserve the integrity of one or the other (or occasionally, both) of these features. However, *which one(s)* provide(s) the key to affirming Kant remains a matter of significant debate. On the former, interpreters such as McCammon view Kant's efforts to "deny knowledge" as inapplicable to the special "symbolic knowledge" theologians can have at their disposal quite legitimately, while others, such as Kielkopf, treat the denial of knowledge more literally, as an anxiety-producing feature of reality that nevertheless has affirmative implications for religious *experience*. And on the latter, some, such as Stevenson, tend to view Kant's critical principles as ruling out the possibility of experiencing God, while others, such as Palmquist, argue that an implicit affirmation of such experience is *present* in Kant's overall philosophical framework, provided we resist the "fanatical" temptation to regard it as providing us with *knowledge* that can be scientifically proved.

Finally, and arguably most significant of all, affirmative interpreters disagree on the precise implications of the *conflict* Kant believed exists between theologians and philosophers. Does an affirmative interpretation work best if we regard Kant's portrayal of the conflict as applicable "only for his time" and attempt to blur the distinction between the roles philosophers and theologians should have today? Or does an affirmative interpretation work best if we (philosophers and theologians) *intensify* this conflict by holding all the more firmly to our different perspectives, as

based on reason or the authority of a tradition, respectively? This issue is highlighted in several essays presented here, including those of the two editors, who themselves tend to disagree over this point. Indeed, one of our main reasons for dividing the book into three parts is to highlight this disagreement. While the issues addressed in Part One do not impinge directly on this dispute, Part Two (on theology) tends to take the latter stance while Part Three (on religion) takes the former. The question here—to use the theological term—is one of *eschatology*: at what point in the historical development of religion do we find ourselves today? Firestone argues that we are not in a significantly different position from Kant himself, so that the perspectives of “Word and Spirit” versus “reason and freedom” must remain distinct. Jacobs develops some possible implications of this position by showing how a philosophical theologian in Kant’s sense can continue to talk, and talk confidently, about God, in spite of the conflict that remains with *biblical* theologians over the issue of authority. Palmquist, by contrast, argues that recent developments in philosophy may encourage Christian philosophers in particular to find their “callings” *within* the church, where they can serve as Christ-like agents of transformation, in a manner that might be described in terms of *realized* eschatology (cf. Kant’s vision of the religion of reason, *practiced now*). Mapplebeckpalmer suggests some possible implications of this position by showing how a pastor can (and does, in an actual parish church) use Kantian principles to organize the government of a real, living body of religious believers.